



TITLE:

<Book Reviews>Jafar Suryomenggolo.
Organising under the Revolution: Unions
and the State in Java, 1945-48. Singapore
and Kyoto: NUS Press in association with
Kyoto University Press, 2013, xiii+215p.

AUTHOR(S):

Vann, Michael G.

CITATION:

Vann, Michael G.. <Book Reviews>Jafar Suryomenggolo. Organising under the Revolution: Unions and the State in Java, 1945-48. Singapore and Kyoto: NUS Press in association with Kyoto University Press, 2013, xiii+215p.. Southeast Asian Studies 2014, 3(2): 441-444

ISSUE DATE:

2014-08

URL:

<http://hdl.handle.net/2433/189570>

RIGHT:

“Other than the enclaves of the nation’s 10 million migrant workers all over the world, the export of Philippine media texts has produced transnational pocket markets—a niche globality in which specific media texts engage with unintended audiences” (p. 152). Kelly Hu’s chapter on Chinese fan subtitling of Japanese and American TV drama series explicates how those fan-subtitlers function as cultural intermediaries linking China with other (Asian) countries and analyzes their affective labor in terms of neoliberal capitalistic work ethics. Hu highlights that, by collaborating with one another to produce subtitles for other Chinese consumers, these fans also “co-produce” global media culture.

In sum, *Popular Culture Co-productions and Collaborations in East and Southeast Asia* is another valuable entry to the currently burgeoning academic field of Asian media and cultural studies. It engages with a number of important historical and cultural subjects by presenting new conceptual methods for understanding processes of international cultural production in the region.

Nikki J. Y. Lee 이지연

School of Arts and Humanities, Nottingham Trent University

References

- Chen, Kuan-Hsing, ed. 1998. *Trajectories: Inter-Asian Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Chua, Beng Huat; and Iwabuchi, Koichi, eds. 2008. *East Asian Pop Culture: Analyzing the Korean Wave*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Erni, John Nguyet; and Chua, Siew Keng. 2005. *Asian Media Studies*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Iwabuchi, Koichi. 2002. *Recentring Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Iwabuchi, Koichi; Muecke, Stephen; and Thomas, Mandy, eds. 2004. *Rogue Flows: Trans-Asian Cultural Traffic*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Organising under the Revolution: Unions and the State in Java, 1945–48

JAFAR SURYOMENGGOLO

Singapore and Kyoto: NUS Press in association with Kyoto University Press, 2013, xiii+215p.

Visitors to Lawang Sewu might be confused as to the building’s significance. Situated in the heart of Semarang on the north coast of Central Java, the building is Indonesia’s most famous haunted house; hence the crowds of domestic tourists. In addition to ghosts, the massive colonial era building is also home to conflicting and competing historical narratives. Once the center of the Dutch East Indies Railway Company, Lawang Sewu was an important site in the history of imperialism and the struggle for independence. Today, as in most of post-colonial Indonesia, the public history

monuments in Semarang speak to the role of the military and other state institutions in the revolution. For over three decades, Suharto's New Order promoted this army-centric narrative as the only acceptable story of the revolution. The Suharto regime explicitly rejected the contribution of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), unions, and other workers' organization to the fight for "*merdeka*," freedom and independence. In Semarang, the Diponegoro Division army museum and a generic phallic nationalist obelisk dwarf Lawang Sewu's small brick memorial to the railway workers who died fighting in 1945. Nowhere is there a mention of history of Semarang as center for union and PKI organization. Indeed, one has to be extremely attentive to find mention of Indonesian workers in the national revolution. Jafar Suryomenggolo's *Organising under the Revolution: Unions and the State in Java, 1945–48* is an important effort to reframe the narrative and write the worker in the revolution.

Organising under the Revolution is ostensibly a work of labor history. However, the implication of Suryomenggolo's well-researched and carefully argued book go far beyond the specifics of these four years of union activism. This work calls for a reconsideration of the Suharto era paradigm of the army and the state being the primary actors in the Indonesian revolution. He persuasively demonstrates that workers, organized more often as local syndicalist groups rather than in a nationally controlled movement, made independent and significant contributions to both the struggle for *merdeka* and to the creation of a new socio-economic order. Reminiscent of E. P. Thompson's argument that the English working class was at its own making and actually played a role in creating its own identity, Suryomenggolo offers a strategic intervention that situates the Indonesian workers as active players in their own history.

While based upon primary research into the details of labor activism in Central and East Java, *Organising under the Revolution* is also theoretically sophisticated. From the opening sentence the author acknowledges his inspiration came from a reading of Benedict Anderson's *Java in a Time of Revolution* (1972). The influence of Anderson's critical, politically engaged, and intellectually rigorous approach to Indonesian history can be seen throughout Suryomenggolo's work. Both authors recognize the crucial impact of the revolutionary events on the construction of post-colonial Indonesia. Their concern with the details of the revolution is to reinsert the Indonesian workers into a narrative dominated by the state-centric approach. As both the introduction and chapter one, "Organised Labour and the Postcolonial State," make clear, what is at stake is not simply getting the details of history right but rather putting the people's agency back into history. Doing so would return labor's political credibility, something Suharto successfully destroyed. The implications of the book's opening argument are that rescuing the lost history of Indonesian labor would help to revitalize contemporary Indonesian labor activism and organizations. Suryomenggolo's de-centering of the state and de-militarizing of the historical narrative, thus has direct implications for issues of social justice in Indonesia's post-colonial socio-economic order.

The book's next four chapters present Suryomenggolo's research. "Workers' Control and

‘Political’ Activism” details how spontaneous and autonomous actions by rail, plantation, and oil refinery workers caught the new revolutionary state off-guard. Unable to reign in the movement, elite nationalists had to accept such actions as a *fait accompli*—at least for the time being. This research carefully details the contributions of labor to achieving independence in moves free of state control that the governing elites decried as “anarcho-syndicalism.” The situation set up an eventual state-labor conflict. “The Politics of Labor Union Formation” covers the efforts of the workers to keep control localized in the face of young state system bent on centralization. Perhaps the strongest chapter is “Building up Organisational Strength: The SBKA in Action.” Here we see how the Serikat Boeroeh Kereta Api (Railway Workers Union) defended the interests of its members against an increasingly aggressive state, often manifest in the army. The discussion of army on railway worker violence is one section of the book which is meticulously researched. Suryomenggolo details the use of strikes to resist arbitrary violence and authoritarian bullying by local officers. Faced with an internecine crisis, the fragile state was evidently unable to reign in the army but did increase its surveillance of the unions. Intelligence gathering indicated a less than favorable view of autonomous labor. The SBKA also sought to assist the material conditions and economic interests of its members by pushing for a stronger “Rice for Workers” program. The final full chapter “Labour and the Law: *Undang Undang Kerdja* 1948,” demonstrates that while unions influenced the first national labor legislation, the state used said legislation to reinforce its dominance over autonomous labor organizations. The paternalist state system defined rights on an individual basis, weakening collective legal identities and limiting collective action. The book ends with an epilogue, conclusion, and appendices on Chinese labor organizations and May Day celebrations. In these final pages we learn that while the state banned strikes in essential industries and government institutions, local army commanders in Java frequently banned all strikes.

This admirable book is difficult to criticize. Theoretically informed, it offers a clear explanation of the significance of this specific historical case study. The supporting research is firmly grounded in archival research in Bahasa Indonesia and Dutch. Perhaps the discussion of the conflict between labor and the army could have been elaborated in more detail. Considering the all-out war on unions and the left that would come under Suharto’s New Order, this is an area of great significance. The book is weak on gender history and analysis. Union and state policies towards women are only discussed on two pages in the middle of the book and not in a sustained manner. There are occasional typos and an inconsistency in spelling (for example, “Suharto” on page 50 but “Soeharto” on page 51).

Organising under the Revolution contributes to a variety of subjects and fields. More than just a history of labor, it offers a revisionist narrative to the state centered story of Indonesia’s revolution. The book offers important theoretical insights into labor historiography and the nature of post-colonial state systems. With its theory firmly grounded in historically specific examples, the book should be of interest to not just scholars of Indonesia and Southeast Asia, but to those who

seek to frame labor history in a global comparative perspective. That said, Suryomenggolo's greatest achievement is to put labor back into Indonesia's history, thus explaining what is missing from Lawang Sewu. As seen on the various popular television shows where adventurers look for ghosts in Semarang's famous haunted house, Suryomenggolo indicates that Indonesian historiography is due for an exorcism.

Michael G. Vann

Department of History, Sacramento State University

Reference

Anderson, Benedict. 1972. *Java in a Time of Revolution: Occupation and Resistance, 1944–1946*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

An Atlas of Trafficking in Southeast Asia: The Illegal Trade in Arms, Drugs, People, Counterfeit Goods and Natural Resources in Mainland Southeast Asia

PIERRE-ARNAUD CHOUVY, ed.

London: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2013, x+214p.

In the context of regional integration, Mainland Southeast Asia is subject to considerable economic activity and cross border trade. An intimately related question concerns extra-legal cross-border activities, such as the trade in drugs, wildlife, contraband, and people. The scholarly attention to these topics is rather large both within Southeast Asia and beyond. However, few attempts have been made in bringing together these different forms of “trafficking,” both conceptually and empirically. This is what *An Atlas of Trafficking in Southeast Asia* attempts to do. As editor Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy makes clear in the introduction, the aim is not merely to juxtapose these different forms of trade, but to “provide a regional and systemic understanding of the variety of smuggling and trafficking activities” (p. 3) as well as illuminating synergies between them.

The book brings together several authors with considerable expertise within the region. The various chapters cover diverse topics such as the trafficking in drugs, arms, logging, wildlife, counterfeit goods, and humans. These different forms of trade are supplemented by several colorful maps which visualize trafficking routes and patterns in Mainland Southeast Asia. One of the key claims the book is making is that there is considerable overlap between these trade routes and that they have significant historical trajectories. For example, as argued by David Capie, one cannot appreciate the arms trade in Mainland Southeast Asia without considering the post-conflict situation in several of the countries. Similarly, the contemporaneous drugs trade can only be understood in